



## Dance Talks Series

*Your monthly fix of inspiration  
and creative conversation*

January-June 2016

### **Making Art Work – With and For the Community January 28, 2016 – 6pm @ DanceHouse**

*Jazmin Chiodi and Michelle Cahill were invited to speak at this talk based on their extensive working relationship with this topic. Jazmin has been firmly rooted in the community of Tipperary Town for eight years as a Dance Artist in Residence with fellow dance artist, Alexandre Iseli. Michelle has extensive experience working on specific commissioned projects, where a particular need among a segment of a community has been identified. This work has taken her across and around the country and she describes herself as being 'helicoptered in' to facilitate these projects as they arise. These respective 'ground-up' and 'top-down' approaches to working with a community are recognisably different, but the objectives of each are similar. Over the course of their conversation between themselves and the audience in attendance, they teased out common practical issues, difficulties, motivating factors and desires for the future. Here, we have summarised key points made by Jazmin, Michelle and Alex during the talk for those who couldn't make it – as well as a record to revisit for those who were there.*

### Practicalities

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*'We arrived in Tipperary – what could we do, make a piece? For who? For what?  
It became evident very quickly that something had to happen with the community' – Alex*

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Jazmin highlighted for us that herself and Alex needed to 'gain momentum to gain visibility' for both the residency and their work. Indeed, momentum is what they have created – a hub in the midlands which offers residency opportunities for other dance artists, an annual festival platform, and many local initiatives which works towards embedding contemporary dance in the lives of their local community. Through this tireless momentum they have indeed created visibility – not only for their own work, but for contemporary dance as a whole in the region.

Michelle emphasised the need to recognise the fundamental practicalities of working with a community, and the compromises that are inevitable. For example, people you have agreed to work with/for do not necessarily understand what you mean by having a clear, clean space in which to work! A lot of the time it is necessary to compromise, however this does not mean that we allow the social importance of the work to subsume the artistic directive. Know what you are willing to compromise on in order to make the project work, and also know what you absolutely want and making sure to ask for it is key to ensuring the artistry stays alive within the project.

While there are many frustrations with this kind of work, reward can be found in the 'little moments of magic' that happen in a process. These are not always evident in the product or the documentation which can be disappointing, but the important thing is the artist knows they happened.

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## Michelle's Project Preparation Mini Tool-Kit

- Be realistic about what you can achieve with a group within a set period of time.
- Take into consideration whether the group dynamic is already existing or if it needs to be created by you as the facilitator, a task which will eat into your time for creation.
- Investigate and use local partners and local suppliers.
- Documentation is absolutely necessary – include your methods for documentation in your application, budget for it, and do more of it than you think you need, because you'll never have enough.
- Accept that most of the time in the documentation you won't see the most meaningful things that come out of a project.
- Remember and accept that we are more prepared to give than they are to receive.
- Recognise the importance of putting in an evaluator and/or mentor for the project. This is someone that you have specifically appointed to talk to you about the project and to offer an external perspective and hold you accountable.

## Isolation & Partnership

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*We very quickly started to feel alone there - Jazmin*

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Jazmin and Alex, not immediately finding the support they needed from those who lived in the area in which they were in residence, looked to other methods of fostering communities. The existing community did not engage at the level they had hoped for, and so instead they created their own community. The Tipperary Dance Platform is not just a performance platform. It aims to provide a space for national and international artists to meet, perform, teach, learn and communicate. It is a place for possibilities – where a group of national and international individuals can create their own community within the time of the festival. And, in turn, this has created another way for the local, existing communities to engage with the activities of the Tipperary Dance Residency.

*There is strength in numbers – just you is not sustainable. Team up! - Michelle*

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Michelle cannot stress the importance of partnership enough. Obviously having a project partner may dilute the overall financial reward from a project. However, this is offset by recognising that with the help and support of a partner to make applications the possibilities of being awarded the projects can also increase. A project partner can also be seen not just to share the workload but can be selected with mutual opportunities for professional development in mind. When discussing methods, we came to the conclusion that teaching dance, or dance-based projects to people with previously limited access to the form does not have to be difficult. All that is necessary is to find the deep importance of dance to you, the quality that made you love it in the first place, and share this quality with the people you work with.

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## Towards the future

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*Contemporary dance for Ireland is still a frontal impact - Alex*

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We must remember that the dance scene in Ireland is relatively young, and that it is not always pleasant for members of the community to think of working with a dance artist. However, it is necessary for Irish people to confront the cultural relationship they have with dance, and to invigorate and accept that relationship. What these participants generally find is that once they get over their imagined dread of the event, they will enjoy and place value on the project... That is why this work keeps happening! There are considerably less of these projects available in tough economic times, but hopefully we can look forward to these projects becoming a priority once more as budgets have the potential to grow in the coming years.

### **Jazmin & Alex's Points for the Future**

- Fully integrating regional projects to a national arts strategy
- Defining/recognising the role of dancer in residence for professionals and communities
- Integrating regional residencies as a structural part of the dance sector in Ireland.
- Breaking the isolation (while recognising that isolation can be socially and personally constructed)
- Create a legacy for people to continue
- Development with venues
- Equity over places – decentralising, and more places radiating the feeling of a hub

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